

LIVING TOGETHER

572 keeps on repeating itself. Some young men introduce a note of
 831 slight sadism when they talk of their 'forcing-in' acts against
 521 unwilling partners. General comments about the goings on in the
 village are an important item in the activities of these groups. The
 latest scandals are discussed and spread to the rest of the com-
 munity in one or other of these groups. Women are classified into
 sexual categories, such as 'the easy' type, 'invite you and later say
 "no"' type, 'the wrestler' type and 'the hollow'. Code words are
 employed to describe different persons. Peculiarities and weak-
 nesses of men are also noted and commented upon. Domestic
 duties do not leave much leisure to young married women. Con-
 sequently they cannot plan any group activity. But they too can
 exchange views, and discuss the latest affairs and developments
 while they wait near the well for their turn to draw water or when
 they go out for washing the clothes and bathing.

576 Middle-aged people have their own groups. These are informal
 521 conversational gatherings; but their membership and attendance
 is nearly fixed. Groups of men and women meet separately;
 although two or three women in the village are privileged and
 have access to some of the men's groups. The village has twelve
 to fourteen men's groups, out of which three are politically and
 socially influential and important. In practically each quarter
 of the village there are one or two groups of elderly women. While
 the membership of the men's groups remains fairly stationary,
 that of the women's groups changes very often, varying according
 to recent quarrels or patching up of past differences. Most of the
 men's groups are formed round some central, politically influential
 figure. Gossip and politics appear to be their most important func-
 tions. Day to day developments in the village are discussed, and
 often the line to be taken in the central village council is worked out
 here long before the council's session. All these groups consist of
 two kinds of members—'regulars', whose loyalty and affiliation
 are not in doubt; and 'occasionals', whose affiliations are shaky,
 but who turn up periodically out of curiosity or with a definite
 [626] purpose. These groups play a significant part in managing the
 affairs of the village, for their comments circulating in the village
 by word of mouth set the pace and direction for further action by
 575 the community in most matters. It should be added here that these
 groups comprise mostly the middle-aged people. While some
 ambitious young men seek to attend them, the aged generally

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stay at home. The middle-aged people have in effect the controlling hand in village affairs; the truly aged retire into insignificance and fade away. Some people cannot become reconciled to such retirement, having enjoyed authority and influence during their active days. They find adjustment difficult, and a life of dependence rather trying. But most people accept their position with good grace, leave active management of the home and family occupations to their sons and consequently find that their adjustment is much less difficult and inconvenient.

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3. CO-OPERATION AND CONFLICT

Within the village community there is an appreciable degree of inter-caste and inter-family co-operation. Earlier it has been pointed out that the social system enjoins co-operation between a number of castes in the fields of economics and ritual. Several aspects of community life depend for their smooth running on this traditional system of mutual give and take. Apart from these conventional ties which are a constituent part of the social structure, several relationships involving voluntary co-operation can be observed. The simplest type of such voluntary co-operation found between neighbours or between friendly families is the system of 'accommodating' each other in time of need. Borrowing little sums of money or small quantities of grain, cooking for a friend during her menstrual impurity or confinement, and looking after children during the short absence of the mother may be cited as examples of this type of co-operation. House building and annual roof repairs also call for the help of friendly neighbours among the peasants of average and poor economic status. Careful mental note is made of all such favours received, so that they may be returned at the appropriate time. Refusing help and returning favours inadequately are looked upon as gestures of unfriendliness or as marks of 'a small heart'. Emergency aid is rushed to friend and foe alike. In cases of serious illness, fire or other accidents it is necessary to help a fellow villager; and in all such cases aid is rarely refused. Socio-religious ceremonies, particularly marriage, and those connected with death, are also important occasions that demand co-operation and help from neighbours and fellow villagers. The burden of the household in which the ceremony is to be performed is considerably lightened because of the help

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